AUTHOR OF "GEORGE SAND" CALLS HIS PLAY AN EXPERIMENT

GEORGE SAND *and* CHOPIN *REPRESENTED BY* MRS. FISKE *and* ALFRED CROSS.

Biographical Comedy of Famous Writer's Life and Love Affairs Perfect Vehicle for Mrs. Fiske's Rare Talent

By PHILIP MOELLER,
Author of "Madame Sand."

I LIKE writing about famous people because I find famous people fascinating, fascinating because they are so charmingly imperfect. Nothing is so interesting to a dramatist—if for a moment I may call myself a dramatist—as imperfect humanity. It is because of the breaks, the infinite little human irregularities, that a character becomes part of the multifarious reality of life and not a puppet, unscarred and painted out with perfections that one can buy at a toy shop provided one have the dull desire or the paltry price.

One of these days I am going to write a play about the immortals. The title is already chosen: "The Shady Side of Olympus" or "The Jealousies of Juno." It is to be a comedy about those people who were gods, those unguessed children of Eve and Adam who sought Olympus as their picnic ground and gossiped through the luncheon hour about that trivial bauble called eternity. It's a fine theme, I think, crowded with laughter, because many an ancient glory may become a modern nonsense.

Time is the telescope through which one sees all. Distance is the true discoverer. Imagine how tiny Mount Everest must appear from afar! The point of view is the real proportioner. How little seem the great! How great the little! And that is why I like to see these great ones through the telescope of time.

It is so comforting to us others, to us little people, this hundred years vista of kindly disillusionment. Can you imagine anything more stupid than a man on a pedestal? The only really interesting things about Saint Simeon Stylites—forever on top a column in the marketplace—were his inconvenience and his dirt. Lift a man or a character from his importance and with his one living breath he will say: "Thank God I am down."

Just a Woman.

I don't think George Sand for an instant ever thought of her pedestal. She was too close to the heart of things. A woman who could stop in the midst of a passionate embrace to straighten the leg of a broken chair; a woman who could risk—perhaps purposely—her lover's disillusionment by being found at 4 in the morning, in a heavy flannel wrapper crowned with curl papers, poking up a garret fire; a woman who could write a hundred books and love a hundred lovers; a woman with so varied a literary catholicity that on the one hand she could translate into her limpid French "Uncle Tom's Cabin" and on the other "As You Like It"; a woman who, with all the celebrities at her feet, spent much of the time of her mellowed fame making marionettes for her son's theatre; a woman who could dress as a man and love as only a woman loves; a woman who crowded a million humanities into one woman's heart—she was too great to be important, too magnificently like us all to be anything but one of us.

For my play I sought out George at the most hectic pitch of her romantic life. She has just broken from the quiet of Nohant where as a child she strayed for hours in the woods reading Rousseau. I don't believe she could have been more than 12 years old before she graduated from the shocking "Confessions" which even to-day no maiden lady is supposed to be found reading in a public bus.

George has broken from Nohant and the ancient threadbare restrictions of a married life. Because her husband beat her she was to beat back at life. And so she came to Paris to try out several lovers as well as a literary career and to decide on literature and De Musset for eternity. This De Musset love was a short eternity, indeed, a couple of months or so; then came Pagello and then Michel de Bourge, whom I have left out of my play together with perhaps some ten or may be fifty other lovers (George was always in love with everyone, though she never knew it) and then Chopin, who was her just reward because she needed, heaven knows, the consolation of his music.

First of the Feminists.

And at the end Chopin and a good ten years to see this through and to survive the passions and the pains, the petulancies and the paroxysms; to survive all—writing, writing, writing—novels that to-day don't matter, journals that to-day would bore one for the pains of reading, autobiographies most interesting when they are least authentic; writing, writing, writing, but what is more important, living, living, living, at the whitest heat of intensity, crowding everything into a life and still holding on to the saving grace of sanity and the cleansing glory of free laughter. She was a whole generation of women in herself, the first of the feminists, so far beyond her time that only to-day are we able to catch up with her.

Indeed it has always seemed amazing to me that our present day feminists have not more definitely recognized in George Sand one of the early high priestesses of many of their dreams and aspirations, if not the first. It is almost impossible to imagine that she has thus been neglected because of what might be called the immorality of her life. As Mr. Hopkins has written in the introduction of the public version of my play: "Only a sensualist could call her scourge a physical one." She was perpetually seeking—what? What the dissatisfied are always seeking—an answer to the riddle of life.

My interpretation of her love affairs is that fundamentally they did not really matter. No woman who really gave her life, her soul and her heart to such a passionate sequence of passionate adventures could have survived in work. With George they were the safety valve for the letting off of superfluous energy.

They were not a real part of the marvellous machine itself, that machine which never missed a cog or slipped its gear, that machine which was oiled by a superbly controlled determination to live life at its fullest, so that while superficially she was dying of the disillusion of a shattered passion, fundamentally she was reacting to the blow of defeat with a gesture of survival and triumph.

Swinburne's Epigram.

She was one of the most womanly of women and at the same time one of the bravest of men. The Britannica credits Swinburne with a mot which is too delicious to remain forever hidden in the uninviting profundity of an encyclopædia. Referring to the De Musset incident, he wrote:

"Alfred was a terrible flirt and George didn't behave like a perfect gentleman."

No, she didn't, and therein lies the richness of her work. She behaved always as life wanted her to behave, disregarding the little code of the moment or the squinting, envious glance of disapproval. She lived as only the great can live—in the full sense of the moment's necessity, giving to life what life demanded and surviving any jealous stricture of defame. She dared to be, and that is why she is to-day and to-morrow and to-morrow's morrow.

As I wrote my play Mrs. Fiske was always leaning over my shoulder. Surely a woman of this calibre must be realized by a woman of that. The combination proved inevitable. When Susan Glaspell, the author, heard that Mrs. Fiske was to do my play she wrote me, saying: "You were right to introduce them. Those two women will get on well together."

And indeed they have. The duet of George and Mrs. Fiske has indeed been wonderful, filled for me with endless delight. Of course, I hope the public will come to love George and Mrs. Fiske's characterization of my famous heroine as I do.

My play is an experiment in the theatre. I have written a biographical comedy. I have let the actual reality of life inform the action, because it seemed to me that in this instance reality was so much richer than any inventive twist I could give the facts.

My play has been called "high comedy." I don't like the term. It sounds snobbish. There is nothing high or low about real comedy—it's just a knowing glimpse of life. Perhaps here and there I've seen into this life of George through the gleaming glass of laughter. And if my play meets with a wide approval no one will be more amazed than I, and if it does it will be because of two chief reasons: first, the pregnant richness of my subject, and, perhaps even more, the rare beauty and authority of Mrs. Fiske's realization of my best intention.

George Sand Composing.

One of the most brilliant scenes in the play occurs in the first act, which is laid in George Sand's apartment in Paris. The guests are Alfred de Musset (who might be described as her current lover and from whom one gathers he is about to part, each being ready to give the other up in an agony of renunciation), Heinrich Heine and Buloz, George's publisher. They are all at supper. Here is a moment or two of their delicious talk:

George—I'm very tired.

(She looks lovingly at Alfred.)

My soul has been sapped to-day, but I must work. That's the one way of forgetting. Six chapters—and I haven't yet planned the fourth.

(She sits for a moment in deep thought eating radishes.)

I'll bring in this farewell supper. Why not, why not, I ask you? My stories are the mirror of my life. Though I write with my heart's blood, still I must write. The supper will make chapter five.

(She begins improvising.)

After the opera this little farewell feast. Bitter herbs and tears.

(She begins eating the onion soup as she talks.)

For weeks Olivia has refused to see Raymond, but that night at the opera to the divine strains of Donizetti their eyes have met.

(She leans toward Heine.)

Have you ever tasted such superb onion soup, Heine? Where was I?

(A moment and then she recaptures her theme.)

Oh, yes! Raymond has left his box and comes over to Olivia's. Her hair is dark as night in the Apennines.

(Then very sadly):

We might have seen the Apennines, Freddo—if—

Alfred—"If" is the epitaph on the tomb of opportunity.

George (patting his hand)—Dear, we must be brave.

(Another loving glance and then she goes on with her story.)

There, in the shadow of her box, whilst the melting music woos the stars—

(Suddenly she jumps up from the table and brings paper, ink and pen from her writing desk. Writing, she repeats)

Whilst the melting music woos the stars—some paper, Buloz—charming phrase, isn't it? There is a hurried conversation. Yes, she will go to his apartments, that very night, for their last supper together. Theirs—and—ours—Freddo—ours.

(She chokes back a sob.)

Heine (the tension getting on his nerves)—I think I will open the window.

George (continuing)—She has ordered her coachman to drive through the Bois. She must think, her brain pulses like Vesuvius.

(She gives a quick glance in Alfred's direction. He sits sadly examining the bottom of an empty glass. She goes on.)

Vesuvius? Aren't there any olives, Rosalie? Passion masters her. Where are the olives, Rosalie?

(Continues) It has begun to rain. She leans from the window. The great drops wound her brow. (She makes a note of this.)

Yes, she will go to Raymond, but—to say farewell. That ought to make a good ending for chapter four.

Heine (dryly)—Yes, very, if it's the end.

George—Chapter five. Her husband has been hunting tigers in the Pyrenees.

Buloz—But are there any tigers in the Pyrenees?

George—What difference does that make? Aren't there giraffes in the zoo?

(Buloz consoles himself with his fish.)

Sentiment and Supper.

George (unruffled)—Her husband, while hunting tigers. (A glance at Buloz.) Is the salmon nice and fresh? (Then she goes on.) While hunting tigers has been wounded. Chapter five brings him back to Paris. At an inn on the way he has seduced Carmella, a peasant girl.

Buloz (methodically)—Of course!

Heine—Is there a peasant girl in Europe that hasn't been seduced?

George (undisturbed)—He brings with him a Spanish dagger bought at Burgos.

Alfred (catching her spirit)—From a stall near the sunburnt cathedral.

George—Sunburnt cathedral—that's a charming phrase, Freddo. (She jots it down.)

Alfred (playfully)—Plagiarist!

George (patting his hand)—Darling. He arrives at his home. It is past midnight. Madame is out. In her boudoir he finds Raymond's handkerchief. He recognizes the crest. Meanwhile the lovers are at supper. How do you like it, Buloz?

Buloz—That's just the place to announce the next instalment.

Alfred—Why, have we decided to part?

George—We?

Alfred—I might have persuaded you to give up writing novels.

Buloz—Nonsense!

Alfred—Then think of the blissful life we might have led together philosophizing under all the chestnut trees in Europe. (He takes her hand.)

George (looking deep into his eyes)—We must learn to live alone, Freddo—alone. (She presses his hand to her lips.)

(Buloz sits watching them.)

Heine (aside to Buloz)—Don't worry, she won't stop writing. Every novel to George is a new love affair. She always sees them through to the end.

George—But you musn't interrupt me, Freddo.

(Then choking back her sobs.)

I call him Freddo because we were going to Italy together. Where was I?

(Recalling.)

The rain has ceased.

(There is a slight disturbance in the kitchen.)

Buloz—Sh—be quiet! Madame is composing.

Rosalie (sticking her head in, rather excited)—I'm beating the eggs for the omelet. (She closes the door.)

George (by mistake sprinkling her salmon with sugar)—They are out on the veranda together in the moonlight.

Alfred—What would the romantic movement do if it weren't for the moonlight!

Buloz—That's sugar, George, not salt.

George (obviously)—She has come to say farewell, but poor, weak woman, she has forgotten the feud 'twixt flesh and spirit. We are but marionettes hung from the nimble fingers of the gods.

Heine (looking up quickly as he breaks his bread)—Yes, all of us! We jig at the end of the wires, poets and cooks, saints and grisettes—hung from the nimble fingers of the gods. All, all of us—even you, George—even you!

Bright Sayings From Play.

Here are some fragments of the unusually brilliant dialogue:

Heine—De Musset has a splendid past ahead of him and besides, he's a poet, a poet soaked in absinthe and dried in moonshine.

* * *

Heine—Life is a seesaw and love swings the plank.

* * *

George Sand—I always mistrust you pessimists. Far down you're apt to be so sweet. Look deep enough in tears, there's laughter and, deep enough in laughter, tears.

* * *

Heine—He is beginning to realize that virtue is its own disappointment.

* * *

George Sand—Need is the only tradition I acknowledge.

* * *

George Sand—It takes generations to make a gentleman, but it takes only one man to make a generation.

* * *

George Sand—The gold he flung about him, that mattered little—I could write, write. The incessant drink—I forgave him that.

Pagello—And the ballet dancer?

George Sand—That too my friend. Do you think that mattered? All that is nothing—nothing, but he has committed the one sin a woman cannot forgive. He has ceased to love me.

* * *

Paul de Musset—Heine told me to tell you, Alfred, that hell is the place where the satisfied compared disappointments.

* * *

Alfred de Musset—Life lays the trap of love and we, poor human fools, are crowding, crowding and waiting to be caught.

* * *

George Sand—There is no such thing as fate. That is what life has still to teach you. Fate is the death cry of the coward.

* * *

Liszt—George, I too have learned from life that nothing is so unlovely as the thing one used to love.

* * *

Liszt—Why, any man knows that love is over the day woman begins telling herself that it will last forever.

* * *

George Sand (to Chopin)—Your art is the most fragile of all the arts. It is born of the moment and as it lives it dies.

Waiting to Attack the Most Trying Ordeal in All the War

By PATRICK MacGILL,
Author of "The Great Push."

IN the first place it was impossible for the men to sleep, for the night was cold, with a chilling wind that pierced the soldiers to the bone, blowing in gusts across the dumb, desolate levels. The cold rain that had suddenly begun to fall was filling the shell craters to the brim and drenching the boys in khaki who lay there waiting for the lift of night and the order to advance.

It was impossible to move. If a man changed his position in the slush it meant that he shifted into a quarter of the shell crater that his body had not warmed. The best plan for a man who had any partiality for physical comfort was to lie still.

To go out on the fields and walk round was not to be thought of. The German guns were churning the earth near at hand; the vicious machine guns snapped at the sodden fields in their blind search for men. For the numb soldiers to remain still in their cramped positions was a great trial, but it was a trial which they could endure with a certain forbearance and patience, for on the quiescence of the individual depended the success of the morrow's enterprise.

The night was gray and ghostly. Somewhere above the clouds a moon, almost full, was in hiding. At moments a flash appeared through the gloom, undulated, then died away. The Germans were sending up star shells over their lines, trying to find out what the obscure night was cloaking in its depths.

The waiting for the dawn of battle is a nerve trying ordeal under any conditions. But to wait out in No Man's Land, in shell craters filled with muck round which the guns of war were incessantly drumming, was terrible.

The soldiers lay in a tomb that was opening and pulling its victims into its unclean depths. The mud sucked the men in like a quicksand; the filth rose greedily, clutching the prone figures and trying to draw them into its embrace. Woe to the man who fell asleep there!

But some of the men were alseep, lying on the rim of the crater with sandbags which they hurriedly filled with mud in front of them. Nothing could be seen but their faces, white as corpses waiting for burial. Their khaki was in keeping with the neutral color of the night.

Now and again when a shell burst near at hand the bare bayonets shone brightly and glinted back the flame of the explosion. And this light also showed up the craters and their muddy water, the helmets sticking out of the muck and the figures of men lying in fantastic attitudes on the field. Some, no doubt, were dead, but all looked the same in the sudden flashes which lit up the scene of war.

The ghostly lights of the night flared, died and flared up again. A dull rustle could be heard as a man slid out from the slush, placed his rifle in a more secure position and covered the breech mechanism with a sandbag. In a little while it would be needed, so it was best to be careful about the action of the weapon that would shield him from death at dawn.

There was a moment's silence and the wind seemed to die down. Near the first tenanted line of craters a star shell rose in air, and profiting by its light an officer got to his feet and looked at a map which showed the objective of the coming attack. A man near him looked at a luminous wrist watch.

"Two hours yet," he grumbled, and sank into the ground again.

Out of the night a group of men appeared. They came from the back area and carried jars under their arms. One of these men—he looked a mere shadow in the night—approached a shell hole and knelt down on the rim. Placing the jar on the soft earth, he looked round and whispered one magical word:

"Rum!"

He did not repeat it. Once was enough. The shell hole became alive and a dozen men dimly outlined in the darkness rose to their feet, the water squelching from their boots. From the darkness other forms crawled in; they were men who had heard the message.

In the midst of hastily spoken questions and whispered answers mess tins were stretched out and the reviving liquid was emptied into them.

"What time is it now?" somebody inquired, and a head bent down toward a luminous wrist watch.

"Five minutes to five," was the answer.

"Another hour and we'll be getting ready for the high jump," a man mumbled in his mess tin. "And not a bit too soon either. I'm sick of waiting."

"Fighting is all right," a man remarked. "But lying like this for hours on end is no fun, I'm telling you."

He spoke truly. The eternal waiting is no fun. It is the most trying ordeal in the profession of war.

The bayonet charge, the quick raid and the hand to hand fight each has its moment when men forget themselves and dare and do big things. In these incidents the glory of man flashes out for a moment and dazzles the world. But the worth of a people, of a nation, makes itself more manifest in the bearing, behavior and endurance of its sons in face of extreme difficulties, under terrible conditions of existence.

A great motive power sustains these men in these moments, and this motive power is patriotism and devotion to duty. The great soul of Britain shines with redoubled lustre over the drab battlefield of muddy Flanders.